Chapter Four (modified, EB) Feb, 14, 2016

Almost no one in Israel knew what we had done. But the next morning, a giftwrapped box arrived from one of the few people who did. We opened it in Avraham's office. Inside were 10 bottles of real French champagne, with a note signed by Tzvi Tzur, the chief of staff. "For the success of the

operation," it said. "Minus two bottles. To teach Ehud Brog not to shut off his field radio."

I assumed the reprimand was tongue-in-(?)cheek, for the same reason I had escaped being locked up as a gasoline thief. The stakes in our Golan mission had been high. Had we failed, the very existence of Sayeret Matkal as an operational intelligence unit might have been put at risk. If we'd been

captured, Tzur and Ben-Gurion would have faced a reopening of all the old wounds from the Uri Ilan mission. Yet, however precariously, the operation succeeded. A few days later, I got word that I was to receive my first military decoration. It was ~~the highest version of~~ the so-called *tzalash*, or operational commendation, awarded by the chief of staff. In fact , there was no physical

‘decoration’ at the time. It was a short, concisely formulated legal-pad size letter from the Chief of staff,addressed to the recipient, saying that the “decorated’ soldier excelled in the execution of certain mission at certain date, ‘Operation Har’ in my case. Especially in The Unit, ‘decorations’, even the actual content of the operation was

not mentioned. It just said ‘ a mission which contributed to the security of Israel/the State’.

My own feeling was more relief than celebration, however, along with a dose of what my piano teachers would have called dissonance. Our commanders – Avraham, Meir Amit, and the chief of staff himself – were clearly delighted with what we’d done.

Meir Har-Zion even phoned from his farmhouse to congratulate us. Yet I knew that we – and I personally, more than anyone else – had made a series of mistakes which could easily have doomed the mission to failure.

Why hadn’t I demand ~~asked Avraham~~ for more reconnaissance flights, to try to establish whether mines, or Syrian patrols, were likely to be a

problem? Why hadn’t I taken a route further away from the Syrian army camp—, assuming in advance that ambushes could be set ***outside*** the fencesand the sentries? After all, we weren’t interested in the base, only in the telephone poles behind it. Above all, how had I allowed us to arrive so unprepared, and unequipptrained, for crossing the swollen river? Why didn’t I insist on checking the stream,

physically, several miles down, where we have an access to it? Couldn’t we move faster on the way up, and probably save the fragile situation with the time-line, and the need to shut down the radio? etc.

In what became a standard part of all sayeret operations, we had a ‘debrief’ of the operation in front of Avraham,the operational officers and those (relatively

few, mainly Yori and the Hilutz force) soldiers who knew what the operation was about. I shared these doubts, mistakes and hindsight lessons, one by one with all of them, claiming that I was the one who should have made it happen. ~~with Avraham and the whole unit.~~ If our maiden mission had taught me anything, it was that no matter how well we might think we'd planned things, there was

always the danger we would miss something, or that we would run up against an unanticipated obstacle. As in any human endeavor, mistakes were inevitable. Yet we had to learn from the mistakes and ensure that, at the very least, we didn’t make the same ones again. That was something we *could* control.

> When Tubul’s team ended service in early 63’ we

remained with only single operational team, Yori’s, one training team which was MY team and just six operational officers including Yori, myself, Zakai, Avi and Mukhtar, as well as the new deputy commander, Dovik, who just joined us, bringing with him more battle experience than all of us, (Avraham included) had together.

(?)(However, quite naturally, I found myself in almost all of the operations, either as commander of the main force or of the back-up *Hilutz*.)

~~In the final weeks of 1962 and into the new year, we returned to the Golan a half-dozen more times. With our improved bugging equipment, the batteries didn't have to be replaced for half a year.~~ NBut

owin the meantime, successes raise the apetite of consumers. Once the taste of intimate intelligence from the telephone lines in the northern sector of the Golan Heights turned familiar. Came the demand/request to instill the same systems in other sectors as well.

Each mission presented its own challenges. And so, just two month after operation ‘Har’

we were deep into preparing a new one on the southern sector, the mountain cliff, some 1500 feet high overseeing Lake Galilee. Yori was the commander, with Nehemia Cohen his excelling soldier, and natural squirrel as well, in Moshiko’s role, on the pole, another two soldiers, and the newcomer,Dovik, as his Deputy. I had to command the Hilutz. The cliff challenge was unique,

we assessed it might take three hours at least to climb it with all our equipment. So as exception from the usual practice, where Hilutz stays ***inside*** our border, we got approval to deploy more than on about one third of the cliff height, well into Syria. Yori went ahead of us and within minutes disappeared from our sight. Almost three hours later a drama started to develop.

Yori, start to vomit extensively,probably some rotten food he got earlier. Dovik took command, not a first time in his career. He got his first Tzalash as a 2nd Lt. veteran of A company when he took command under fire during a raid on Kalkilia, back in 56’. He didn’t think he needs the Hilutz. I tried to convince Avraham at the command post to allow us at least to climb

another 500-600 feet, so that we will be closer, just in case it deteriorates further, but couldn’t get the permission. They,now under Dovik, were just 300’ under the top of the cliff. He left Yori with one of the soldiers and kept moving upward with the other two. Then, twenty minutes later, near a water spring just as they approached the cliff top, he identified a Syrian ambush.

He decided to leave there another soldier to follow them. And continued alone with Nehemia. The two of them completed the mission on their own, and came back, collecting along the way the rest of the task force.~~we wanted to plant other intercepts. The aim was to give us the ability to listen in on the Syrians' entire Golan communications network. The way the operations~~

~~were organized, the commander for each mission chose his team from the whole of the sayeret, trying to match the soldiers' particular strengths to the requirements on the ground. Avraham included me in all of them, either as commander of the main force or of the back-up *shilutz*.~~

[EB. To consider.]~~Each mission presented its own challenges.~~ Sayeret Matkal was

probably the best trained unit in the entire army. Until the first Golan operation, we had done nothing *but* train. (We could climb hills. We could trek miles at a stretch through deserts, heavily vegetation covered mountains, ~~or~~ orange groves or river valleys in darkness, using a “map” imprinted from memory in our minds. We could fire an Uzi, anti tank personal weapons

or a mortar. We could set an explosive charge to blow a hole in a building, or a *bungalo* to gash through barbed-wire fencing). Yet now that we were dealing with real operations, we had to rely on the qualities of initiative and improvisation that ~~Avraham had rightly assumed~~ would always be so critical to success.[EB.Till here.]

~~Nowhere was this more true than in~~ The next operation, now in the central sector, challenged us with finding a solution to the problem which nearly defeated us on our first mission: the Jordan River and its Golan tributaries. By early spring 1963, we had already installed bugging devices in the north and south of the Golan. All that was left was to target the heartland. This time

Uri Zakai was to command it. I once again led the Hilutz which had the task of moving Zakay and his team over the river. This was the highest stream time ,with snow melting on the Hermon Mountain.I led a team that set off from Kfar Hanassi, a kibbutz north of the Sea of Galilee. This time, we would not have to cross just a tributary of the Jordan. We had to negotiate the upper reaches

of the river itself, across a steep gorge carved, as if by some huge knife, in the Golan’s basalt crust. There was no way we were ~~I was~~ going to risk using the parachute wire again. In the weeks leading up to the operation, we~~I~~ experimented, together with the technological unit, with a number of makeshift alternatives. we~~I~~ finally settled on using a rifle mounted anti tank

grenade/munition~~mortar~~ – minus the explosive filling~~shell~~. We added anchor-like four metal sticks to it’s head and connected to its tail a thicker (0.4”) light nylon cable. It ended like a rifle mounted short harpoon, which instead of the whale’s body, has to stick, once being shot, to the heavily, thick tangle of shrubbery on the far bank of the river. ~~rigged it to fire a~~

~~thicker length of wire tipped with a small anchor. The idea was to shoot it into the tangle of shrubbery on the far bank of the river.~~ Then we would tug with all our strength to satisfy ourselves that it held.

One by one, each of Zakay's task force~~us~~ would slide across the river, clipped by a hook to the main wire, and by a thinner safety wire grabbed by~~to another~~ two ~~team~~ member~~s of my~~

Hillutz force, on our bank, who could pull him ~~us~~ back if necessary.

—It worked. Mission successfully accomplished for the third time. When that mission was over, no part of the Golan remained outside our ~~eavesdropping net.~~

Between operations, I threw myself into making my new recruits a full part of a

sayeret as fast as possible. It was clear we're entering a new stage. Operations will come if we will be ready on time to execute them. Tthat had changed ~~dramatically~~ since I joined. Although Meir Har-Zion and the other ex-commandos still put in an occasional appearance, we were now responsible for our own training, preparation and planning. Dovik, rather than Avraham, will end up our

fighting tactics and normal-army practices source of authority. Officers' school gave ~~had helped give~~ me the confidence to command. But it was my own experience of Sayeret Matkal in its infancy which shaped how I led my new Team~~unit~~. Avraham had been acting out of instinct and intuition, not operational experience or expertise, when he'd chosen the British SAS

under Major Stirling, Palmach, Unit 101 and Company A as his models. He wanted a group that was physically tough~~er than any in the Israeli army~~, but also possessed action oriented imagination; free spirit which admits no limits; ready to initiate, dare and take risks; yet sober enough to calculate them thoroughly. More important than all, characters who

wouldn’t come back without executing the mission.

—a loose,(?) loping, self-confident ~~swagger. Now that I had led~~ [EB. Swagger we were not. Brigand- probably. Avoid swagger all along the book. That was what I/we hated most.]

My first real mission~~s~~ onto the Golan, validated for me an earlier intuition that~~I~~ ~~realized~~ this was precisely the

mix of qualities we will needed in the field.

Initially, I had a half-dozen of new soldiers in my Teamunit. A few monthweeks later, when few foiled out/ left for being unabale to take it, we added a trio who had initially joined Israel's equivalent of the US Navy SEALs, Shayetet 13, but who couldn't swim good enough. had lacked the specialist skills needed for seaborne

~~operations.~~ In background, they were a mix: more than half Kibbutzniks. about half from Sephardic families wwith certain acquaintance of Arabic~~Sephardim and Ashkenazim, from fairly comfortable families or more disadvantaged~~. But they were eager, smart and, as I had been when I joined, energized by being part of a sayeret where each assignment, each day, presented challenges

on which their individual quickness of foot and of mind was both valued and needed. I trained them with personal weapons, Uzis, rifles, both ours and the enemy's ones.differnt machine guns, ant anti tank grenade launchers, mortars and *bungalos*. I taught them personal soldiership, working in small squads of two and three, then fighting, live fire exrecises as a whole

team , day and night time. In the open, in boulders areas, in bushy areas, inside buildings and in the trenches and bunkers of a fortified positions. We’ve taught them communication equipment, first aid, mine sweeping and preparing of IEDs, Yhey were all paratroopers with several jumps each, but we added to it marine raid practices in rubber boats and survival in salt water.but more

than anything else we spent long long weeks, once and again navigating, mainly at nights in squads of two, all over the small country of Israel. We had a huge 1:100 000 scale of Israel, some four yards long from north to south. We used to put every path of every squad in every navigation training on this hugh map. By the time I left the Team, in almost two years, we’ve covered all

unhabitated rural and desert areas in an immensely dense collage of trajectories which left ‘Holes’ only around Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and few dozens of other bigger cities. ~~them to work not just as a unit, but in smaller teams of two or three, on trial overnight crossings into Lebanon and Jordan.~~ I occasionally took them up to Meir Har-Zion’s hilltop farm in the north, ~~both to expose them~~

~~to his insights and experience and provide Meir with some additional free labor in his seemingly unending quest~~ to help shore up the fences on the slopes of the large property for the cattle herds to be controlled.~~stone wall around the property.~~

I also led them on a series of night raids on Israeli air force bases and military installations, designed to hone

both their skills and their (?)swagger. Besides the base commander, only the sentries were given advance notice that an exercise will take place to check their capacity to identify and respond.~~we were coming~~. That meant the guards were on heightened alert, which made our task more challenging. It also ensured their weapons~~Uzis~~ wouldn’t be loaded. Our aim was to get inside,

where we would place chalk-mark mementos of our visit on airplanes, tanks and munitions or even at the safe inside the office of the base commander (my personal edge/ favorite), and get out again without being seen. In a half-dozen attempts during the first half of 1963, we managed to provoke a half-dozen urgent security reviews. No one, not even the sentries, knew we'd

been inside the bases until they went on duty the next morning.

Of all the reasons I was grateful to Avraham Arnan, none was more important than the confidence he had showed in me. In some ways, we were very different. He was openly enthusiast visionary, gregarious, fun-loving and brimming with charm and warmth~~self-confidence~~. He was

confident, naturally ‘streaming’ with men ,or women, one on one or in small groups. Avraham was quite insecure when it came to individual skills in the army matters and field command, but had a confidence in his intuitions and judgment about ***people***. And how they can help ***his*** ideas materialize. He was a collected personality in the sense of being fully aware, that he is much stronger on

moving people emotionally, than in providing them with the detailed guidance in their follow-up action. It caused him no cognitive disonance, just a drive to focus on what he was good at.

~~I did not lack an inner trust in my own abilities. But~~ I was quieter and more reserved, a young officer still finding his way. But with an emerging innate self

confidence, in my capacity to swiftly judge complicate situations and immediately act upon them.

I was young and inexperienced. Still, he had not hesitated to ~~give me a command role as soon as I got back from officers' school. When he'd had to deal with Tubul's departure for the Technion, he~~ entrust~~ed~~ me with the sayeret's first operational

mission. Once this one succeeded, his first intuition in regard to me ‘validated’, Avraham didn’t even hide his prefernces when it came to something we’d never yet tried. In the months since, he had ~~included~~ me as a Hilutz commander in all our other crossings into Syria.

Now he selected me as a kind of advance scout in entirely new territory for the sayeret.

In early 63’ we ~~Since returning from his stint at staff college, he had been cultivating links with the few military units outside Israel trained to do anything like what we did. In early 1963, we~~ hosted a visit by France’s airborne commando~~s~~ of Col. Albert Merglen, an Indochina French war hero and the subject of Jean Larteguy book The Centurions: the *11th Demi*

Brigade Parachutistes de Choc. It was a part of ‘grey area’ cooperation of the Mossad with (its equivalent) the French SDECE, which was independent at the time (it got under the Min. of Defense and changed it’s name, two years later in 65’,upon the scandal following the murder in Paris of a Morroccan rebel named Ben Barka).

Col. Merglen lead an impressive small delegation and we were supposed to present to this battle seasoned Special Forces commander, the Israeli emerging Special Forces.

With the French delegation as spectators we staged a live fire, day raid, exercise(so he can actually watch it) on a fortified position with trenches, several fortified concrete positions, barbed wire

with anti personnel mines around it, and a two stories building at the center, in a training area named Barfilia, not far from present day city of Modi’in. It enabled us to show a wide range of skills: approach, cover fire, bungalow cutting of the fence while securing a trail in the mine field, fighting in trenches, taking over a fortified concrete-made, heavy machine

gun position and the end even the taking over of a building and fighting in it. ~~Our part of the proceedings was classic~~ Avraham, in his frustrated/would-be film director persona insisted we will be wearing our formal, rather than fatigue, uniform, under our battle gear, and all wear French-style red berets rather than impersonal helmets. We did. During the performance

there was a small surprise. Our main weapon in the assaulting force were Uzi’s. This is a short automatic weapon, easy to operate at tight places like trenches, bunkers or inside rooms or staircases in a building. The price, however, as Col. Merglen surely noticed, was that you could not have the fire power of anti tank grenade launchers. With the French commandos as spectators, we

~~staged a mock attack not far from Lod Airport.~~ which were used against buildings or fortified positions, but could be mounted only on a long barrel rifles. We found a bypass to this. Uri Zakay’s father was a Lt. Col. And a leading engineer in the Israeli Military Industries which was a state owned entity producing and developing weapons. He arranged for us to get some 25

newly developed, not yet exposed, AT grenade launchers for the Uzi’s. Once we breakthrough the fence and cleared with life fire the trenches ,we turned towards the two stories building at the center. And from the trenches, we simoultanously shot 25 AT grenades at the building. Impact was great. And we charged into the building when it was still fully covered by

smoke and dust, heavily impacted. ~~He even had us supplement our uniforms outfits with French-style red berets. I~~ I~~doubt i~~t was probably this fire salvo, not the red berets that did the trick, but Col. Merglen was genuinely impressed. He walked to the building to scrutinize the damage and wanted to see the launchers. The next day a disturbing investigation

launched from the higher levels on our side: “How the hell unit 269 got these launchers, that the French Guest, now ,is asking to buy?, (where the launchers had not even completed their R&D phase) ,and who the hell approved their passing to The Unit and their use?.

Two months later, thethe French proposed a series of further exchanges. The first

would involve a Sayeret Matkal officer spending nearly twohree months in their training headquarters, which was run jointly by the French Army and with the French SDECE (equivalent of the Mossad). The idea was for us to get exposure to leading an *équipe contre-guerrilla*: a counter-insurgency team.

Avraham chose me to go. I was about to join the Special

> Forces course for Chef de *quipe contre-guerrilla*: a counter-insurgency team Commander. The French base was in a 17th-century stone fortress called Mont Louis, near the Spanish border, high in the Pyrenees. The trip itself was an adventure. I had never been outside Israel, at least legally. I had no passport. I didn’t own a suit, or even a tie. But within days, I was

kitted and fitted. As was standard procedure for intelligence officers going abroad, I was even given a new name, chosen, no doubt, by a clerk in Aman. For a few months, I would not be Ehud Brog, but Ehud Vered – Hebrew for “rose”. I had some four weeks to prepare. So I even took some quick lessons of the French language. I boarded an El Al flight from Lod to Paris

and then, at a stormy night, on a small French Caravelle jet, with wings fledgling like leaves/bird wings in the storm, to an extent I was worried was beyond the physics I knew ~~by train,~~, I made it to Perpignion, ~~my way at to~~ the southernast corner of France. Nowadays, I would no doubt have Googled Mont Louis before going. Back then, I’ve learnt when I got there ~~I was left to~~

~~rely on the researcher’s equivalent of muscle memory: in my case, from my childhood visits to the kibbutz library. I bought a couple of volumes on French history from a used-book store in Tel Aviv. I read about~~

how the fortress had been built, over a two-year span beginning in 1679, by the greatest military engineer of his time, Louis XIV’s head of

fortifications, Marshal Sébastien Le Prestre de Vauban.

~~There was a photo in one of the books, though it came nowhere near to conveying the impact of seeing Mont Louis for the first time.~~ I had barely a minute~~10 seconds~~ to digest that first impression, however, before a trio of people, one of them a hulking officer in camouflage fatigues and the others in civilian dress and

long coats, extended the French special forces equivalent of a welcome. They walked me outside the fortress and stopped over the deep moat that surrounded it all around.

"Take off your tie and jacket," the officer said.

When I'd done so, they had me stand on top of the outer wall of the moat~~fortress~~. ~~It overlooked what obviously had once been a moat.~~ Now it was

missing a critical element: water. Thirty feet below was a floor of gray stone. The officer directed my eyes to ~~a thin~~ wooden pole, the thickness of a telephone poles, which I knew quite well, at about four feet distance from the wall.

"Jump there," he said in French, which one of the civilians translated into English. "Grab the pole solidly when you slide down~~jump~~."

Not sure whether this was serious, my mind flashed back to, of all places, Mishmar Hasharon, to when I was not even four years old. My father was playing host to an electrical engineer from Tel Aviv. The man was inspecting the systems my father had helped install, and he had brought his own son with him. The boy was a year older than me, and taller and bigger.

While the grown-ups were talking, he perched himself on the ledge of our sandbox, which was under a huge mulberry tree near the centre of the kibbutz. Whooping in delight, he leapt in. “Jump, Ehud!” he called out to me. The ledge was probably a foot high. But to me at the time, it looked *really high* ~~a lot higher~~. I was genuinely afraid to jump. I glanced over at my father, who was usually

the epitome of caution, hoping he'd tell me not to do it. But perhaps in part because he was keen to impress the inspector, he simply nodded at me to go ahead. I looked down at the sand. I looked at the other kid. And I thought to myself: no matter how scary this seems, this kid just did it. He survived and smiling. I jumped.

Now, sensing my hesitation, the three persons were looking

at me, screening my face and my movements. No one to nod. ~~it was the French commando who nodded at me.~~ I looked more closely at the pole, and saw that it was worn smooth by the hands and bodies of ~~dozens,~~ maybe hundreds, of other inductees(?)/special forces trainees who had made the same leap. Assuming they hadn't broken into little pieces on the moat floor, that seemed a

pretty fair sample of survival. So I jumped.

When I'd made my way back up to the welcoming party, the officer treated me to a broad smile, a handshake and a Gallic embrace. The two civilians were laughing loudly~~smiling~~, and introduced themselves, in Hebrew to my surprise. Motti Kaparov, of Kibbutz Hulda, now in Mossad, Nathan, a Mossad agent, both are now on the

liason team with the SDECE.

~~too, and it took only a few words in Hebrew for me to realize they weren't even French. They were Mossad operatives, from Paris, along for the show.~~

~~If I'd known a bit more about my French comrades at the start, I might not have jumped.~~

There were eigh~~six~~teen of the "shock parachutists" most of them seasoned NCOs, as ell as

few officers, all in their late twenties or early thirties. Six to ten years older than me, taking the course – and seven or eight ~~mix of~~ officers and instructors – in residence, running the course.

They were the very definition of toughness. The guy~~guy~~ who instructed us in building booby-traps and "assault with explosives" was 42 years old Captain who had

parachuted behind German lines in the Second World War just before I was born. All of them had fought in Indochina, then Algeria. One had operated behind Vietminh lines, near the Chinese border, surviving for a year-and-a-half on an assortment of nuts and berries, tree bark and snakes. With the benefit of my sayeret training, and the fact that I was– much younger, with much less alcohol

and nikotin in my vessels~~less than half their age~~, I was their equal, even better, in fitness. But I’d never experienced anything nearly as realistic~~tough~~ as some of the training~~rial~~ elements~~s~~ we were put through. There was in my colleagues high level of acquired physical self confidence, stemming out of aa unique and highly risky training standard. The

‘obstacles course’ of some 15 minutes we had to go through evry day in the fortress .included among others ~~Nor anything requiring a quality which every one of them seemed to have wired inside: an utter absence of any sense of danger.~~

~~In one exercise, we had to to~~ cross~~ing~~ on a naked ¾” steel cable between two of the fortress’s turrets crawling on the cable with one leg twisted

around it and the other hanged low, to make sure your overall center of weight will be lower than the cable, so you won’t freely fall down. In another, we had to climb inside the fortress building four-stories high chimney to the roof. ~~were taken inside a stone chamber whose walls narrowed to a steep triangle at the top.~~ We had to inch ourselves, our back to one side of the chimneys while our

feet pushing us up against the wall in small 10” “steps” higher and higher over the floor ~~froglike, from the bottom to the top~~.Once on the roof we had to cross toward the other building some 15 yards apart over the top of a stone wall, some 20” wide but not a flat top but triangular cross section one. So, the only way was to crouch on it. Both your palms on the sharp upper edge

of the wall. The thumb on one side of it and the four fingers on the other, your body arced like a cat when he plans a jump over a gap, and your legs with open knees, to enable the feet to come close from both sides into the slope of the stone and yet get some grip on it. Than you have to move forward, throwing your upper body forward and grip once again the sharp side of the triangle with

both palms. Than tilt your lower body part and jump with open knees and feet close to the two side- slopes and land again with your feet on the sloped stone.some fourty jumps would bring you quite scared at first times to the other building. And of course the pole at the moat. The catch was that ***all*** these were done without any safety cable and hook in sight. Almost reckless

gambling of self confidence and skill. —The outdoor training was also an entirely new challenge. Mont Louis itself was nearly 50001~~,700~~ feet altitude and deep into the mountains, but we made, equipped with full alpinist military gear three days hike onto the summits over Mont Louis, which reach well over 10000 feet, fully covered with heavy snow and ice from 7500

feet and up. Tethered to each other by ropes in case of a fall, or an avalanche, we trudged for hours each day. The moving on the slope with the different “shoes” for the snow and ice. We were trained in blocking a collective slid on slippery slopes using our piolets as artificial ploughs.we were trained in digging cave in the snow to protect ourselves and survive a

storm, and so on. We were trained in cliff climbing on natural rocky walls where the different tracks were signed by letters on the wall. And you were supposed to climb from one to the other. It was no more than thirty feet high. But once again, there was no safety cable around. For an untrained novice like me it was really frightening. ~~went~~ on a five~~seven~~-days survival hiking

exercise~~hike~~ into the Pyrenees, in an area sandwiched between the borders with Spain and Andorra at well above 6~~9~~,000 feet. We've to raid at nights on different targets and hide by days (other units were searching for us).yet in order to survive we turned hunters-gatherers, collecting every possible food and survive, ~~On the way up, it was pouring rain. But even in late May, the~~

~~higher reaches were covered with snow. Tethered to each other by ropes in case of a fall, or an avalanche, we trudged for hours without a break.~~ In the evening, dinner consisted of French commando cuisine, with the guy who had operated behind the lines in Indochina serving as chef. The menu varied: insects, tree bark, or snakes which he trapped and strangled with his

bare hands, open along with hia knife, cut short and grilled for us. I couldn’t eat anything but forest berries. The snake tasted like a piece of rubber tire. .

When we were training inside the fortress, normally , theory of guerilla, including Mao and Giap. I couldn’t understand a word. there was a break for lunch. And since the *parachutistes de choc* were,

after all, French, the ritual began with cocktails in the officers’ club. Then, a Paris-restaurant-standard meal, served by soldiers in special chef’s and waiters uniform, some two hours long, and copious quantities of wine. I didn’t drink at the time, but I could hardly abstain altogether. Often, the first exercise after our repast would be pistol marksmanship. Fortunately, the

instructors kept well clear when it was my turn. The rest of the group seemed unaffected by the *vin rouge*.

Though I was enthralled by the whole experience, I was also aware of an edgy, slightly dangerous, underside to the unit. Later, I would discover that every one of my comrades had been supporters, or members, of the O.A.S., a far-right anti-De Gaulle opposition

within the French army in the late 1950s. In Algeria, they had participated in a spate of free-lance attacks on the insurgents, and on civilian targets as well. Though Algeria had been granted independence the year before, these men were still transparently unreconciled to it. The whole demimbrigade was deliberately deployed at the furthest place from Paris. Officers couldn’t

drive their Pegeout to Paris without a written permission from boyh the Armed forces HQ and the internal affairs committee of the “assembly National”. When ~~Sometimes~~ we would go into town for a movie, or a drink. When we walked on the pavement~~approached~~, the locals would cross the street to avoid us.

Less than half a year after I left Mon Louis, in December

63’ the whole ‘11th demi Brigade Parachutists de Shoc was dismantled after it was found that a group of leading officers were involved in attempts on the life of De Gaulle.

FewThe days after my return from France in early June, Avraham ~~brought the unit together and~~ asked me to share my experiences with the officers of The Unit. I began

with the positives, things from which I thought we could learn. I singled out the highly risky training norms, extraordinary sense of self-confidence, allied with individual excellence and teamwork, that the French commandos had developed from repeated exposure to almost incredible extremes of danger. Their success, I felt, depended not on *eliminating* risk. That was

impossible. It was about ~~discipline, and~~ professionalism, long service of the best commandoes as a life career of team members.~~all directed towards averting or at least minimizing those risks that were under your control.~~

There was, I sensed from the French commandos, no better enforcer of these qualities than the knowledge that one mistake could cost you your

life. But I concluded by telling them about the *politic*al somewhat fascist mindset, and the deep alienation, almost fear of the civilians,.s of the officers of Mont Louis, about which I'd learned more from the Mossad guys who had accompanied me back to Paris. That aspect, I suggested, was a reminder of the danger of the *mis*-application of the same

qualities which made the commandos so formidable as a military unit. “The ethos of a unit like theirs, and a unit like ours, is essential to making us strong,” I said. “But what I saw in France was an entire ecosystem that these guys had created, extremely patriotic in their own minds, reinforced day after day by each other – but dangerous for the society as a whole.”

A few days later, we had the ‘Fruit Feast, the semi annual celebration of the summer. [EB.here should come I think the story of the Samsun Billboard. And follow it with this meeting with Amit. He came to The Unit to talk to the operational soldiers., just an hour before the feast. We can alternatively put it elsewhere , but relatr it to this, July 63, time.EB.]Avraham

called the officers of the sayeret together again. This time, it was to meet with Meir Amit. More than anyone but Avraham himself, Amit had been responsible for turning the sayeret into an operational unit. [EB. Too early. He left only in March 64.]He'd been head of military intelligence for nearly two years. [Now, he was moving on. I was

disappointed, though not surprised.]

[EB. That’s probably after the Sinai op.(?) to check)]]Soon after he’d taken over, he invited all of us to his home in Tel Aviv, to outline his hopes for Sayeret Matkal, and to get to know us. He was typically forthright. He told us how much he was looking forward to the intelligence brief, and how he preferred

that role to a further stint as number-two to the chief of staff. As for the top job, he would hold on to see whether he might be next in line – knowing, as we all did, that Yitzhak Rabin was the more likely choice. If it became clear that he would again have to wait his turn, he told us he’d happily move on. He would leave the army – which, at age

42, he was now about to do.EB. till here.].

He was becoming head of *civilian* intelligence: the Mossad.

For the time being, however, he was too valuable to be moved out of military intelligence. Alongside his Mossad role, he was staying on as head of Aman for a further ninefew months. [EB. Move to Feb 64’.]

[EB. It was probably after five ops. Sometime before I left . here we can say that even before I left Meir told us this. And now I understood it could happen.EB.]Still, he said he wanted us to know, and appreciate, how much we had achieved in our first half-year of cross-border operations.

“The first one?” he said, looking directly at me, ~~and smiling~~. “You can never know

whether it wasn’t just dumb luck that it succeeded. The second one, too. And the third and fourth ones maybe. But now, that you’ve succeeded in a series of five consecutive operations, you’re on a different footing. You know what you’re doing. You’ve succeeded as a unit. You are in a position where, like any military force, you can even afford to fail.”

I knew what he meant. Even so, I couldn’t help thinking that in saying it, he was tempting fate. It was one thing to have earned the luxury to be able to slip up. But what would happen if we *did* actually fail?

I was about to find out, alongside my oldest friend in the sayeret, Uri Zakay.

* * *

[[[Uri and I had now worked together for almost three years. I had not only become close to him. I had also got to know his parents and younger sisters, who lived in– Zahala, the prestigious Officers' neighborhood, were 'every one' from Avraham to Zvi Zur to Dayan were living~~a kibbutz not far from Mishmar Hasharon and who we would occasionally visit together~~.

~~(We were going back onto the central part of the Golan, fording the Jordan across the steep gorge to the east of Kfar Hanassi.~~ **The mission was** this time **to replace the batteries in the device** Uri's task force~~we~~ **had installed shortly before my trip to Mont Louis.**) ~~As always, we chose a moonless night. Uri was leading the operation. I was in charge of~~

~~the *shilutz*. In theory, that meant that my team would remain on the Israeli side of the border. But that made no sense. Given the need to the climb on to the plateau, and the steepness of the descent towards the river, we would be useless to Uri's team if it got into trouble crossing the river. So we crossed into Syria together.~~

~~When we reached the near bank of the Jordan, Uri fired the mortar with its makeshift harpoon. The rest of the team tugged hard on the cable, making sure it was secure.~~ Uri was the first to cross. He hooked himself onto the cable. He fastened the second cable to his belt so that we'd be able to pull him back in case of trouble. At first, things went to plan. His torso remained

~~above the waterline, with only his legs submerged. But when he was halfway across, the strength of the current, even more powerful than when we'd done our operation in the early summer, began tugging him downstream. He tried to pick up his pace, but the flow seemed to get stronger and stronger. Holding our end of the cable on the near bank, we were making sure it held secure. At first,~~

~~we had no idea anything was wrong. In the darkness, all we could see was Uri’s faint outline about 20 feet away. But the river wouldn’t surrender. The cable started to arc and strain. Finally, the anchor on the opposite bank wrenched loose. It was dragged rapidly downstream, before lodging between two large boulders.~~

~~**Uri reacted just as we’d been trained. He took out his**~~

~~field knife. He tried to slice through the cable to free himself. But as he was swept downstream, the cable got tangled tightly around his waist.~~

~~I heard only a muffled shout. None of us could see anything.~~

~~“Pull on his belt cable! Pull!” I shouted. But the harder we tugged, the tauter it seemed to get, and there was no~~

~~sign we were managing to bring Uri back. I leapt off the bank. I waded in as far as I could without being pulled under, straining to see what was happening. Following the main cable with my eyes, I saw it had angled sharply downriver. “Pull again,” I shouted back to the soldiers on the bank. They did, but still nothing happened.~~

~~“Kobi, go after him,” I yelled. Kobi Meron was over six foot tall. He was the strongest guy in the sayeret, with the possible exception of Uri himself. We hooked him to the main cable, securing the second one to his belt. He began sliding across in hopes of finding Uri. Within three or four seconds, he did. Uri was losing a battle to keep his head above the river. He was~~

~~taking in water. He was barely breathing. With the main cable tangled around his midsection, every time we had tried to pull him back, we'd been tightening a vise around his waist. Kobi immediately cut him loose, and wrapped his powerful arms around him. "Pull!" he called, his plea only just barely audible. We did, bringing both of them back.~~

Uri had by now stopped breathing. One of the men on my *shilutz* was a guy named Rafi Friedman, who I'd included because he was a trained paramedic. Rafi told one of the others to prop Uri over his knee, face down, while he pressed harder and harder on his back in hopes of clearing his air passages. It took only a few seconds – the whole debacle had lasted barely a

minute or two. But finally, first in weak gasps and then gradually deeper, Uri began to breathe again.

He spent nearly a month in the hospital. In our repeated efforts to pull him loose, we had damaged one of his kidneys. When I began visiting him, a day after he was admitted, the doctors told me he was urinating blood. But with his mix of physical strength and

determination, he was back to something near full health within a week or two. They kept him for a further week, to make sure he'd suffered no lasting damage. Incredibly, he hadn't. He, and we, were lucky he had survived at all.

We had learned a further, frightening lesson in fording rivers: even our makeshift anchor system was dangerously inadequate. By the next time we

~~crossed the gorge, we had developed an aluminum bridge, which we assembled in six-feet-long components and disassembled on the far side of the river. It had its own drawbacks. The trade-off for its lightness was that it could handle at most 250 pounds of weight in its broad middle section. This meant only one of us could cross at a time.~~

We were going back onto the central part of the Golan, fording the Jordan across the steep gorge to the east of Kfar Hanassi. As always, we chose a moonless night. Uri was leading the operation. I was in charge of the Hilutz. I was responsible now, not just to come to help Uri into Syrian Heigths if something went wrong during the operation, but also

to make sure they safely cross the river.

We came to the same point we knew from the previous operation. But the water seemed somewhat higher and somewhat faster than last time. We deployed, looked and listened for few minutes to verify there is no one on the other bank, then, ‘covered’ by the roaring sound of the river, shot the harpoon. And pulled it

tight/fast to make sure it is stable.

Uri was the first to cross. He hooked himself onto the cable. He fastened the second cable to his belt so that we'd be able to pull him back in case of trouble. At first, things went to plan. His torso remained above the waterline, with only his waists submerged. But when he was one third of the way across, the strength of

the current, much more powerful than when we'd done our operationthree months ago, began tugging him downstream. The cable started to arc and strain. He tried to pick up his pace, but the more he entered, the flow seemed to get stronger. Holding our end of the cable on the near bank, we were making sure it held secure. But the river wouldn't surrender. Uri was almost up to

his shoulders in the wavy stream when he came close to halfway across. It was total darkness around, but the distance was only ten or twelve yards and we could still observe the contours of his shoulders line ,neck and head. Then suddenly, Uri disappeared. I was standing on the bank, just besides the first guy, out of four, who were holding the cable tight. I stretched my

left hand and put it on the two cables. Both were pointing almost ***fully*** downstream , not perpendicular, or almost perpendicular to it. It became immediately clear that the anchor on the opposite bank wrenched loose and Uri was dragged rapidly downstream, (before lodging between two large boulders).

Uri reacted just as we'd been trained. He took out his

field knife. He tried to slice through the cable to free himself. But as he was swept downstream, the cable got tangled tightly around his waist.

(I heard only a muffled shout. None of us could see anything).

“Pull on his belt cable! Pull!” I ordered the four guys who held the thin one. But the harder we tugged, the tauter it

seemed to get, and there was no sign we were managing to bring Uri back. “ Pull the main cable!” I’ve ordered the other group. I knew the harpoon was too big to get through the hook which connected Uri to it. And I assumed that if we pull it hard enough it might be somewhat inconvenient to Uri but it’ll bring back Uri ***and*** the harpoon wrapped togother. Four strong soldiers couldn’t

move it beyond stretching more and more the thicker nylon cable. Time was slipping out of our hands. I've realized that's could end badly. I leapt off the bank. I waded in as far as I could without being pulled under, straining to see what was happening. There were two trees hanging over the water in the next ten yards down the stream, thus I couldn't see anything. Following the main

cable with my eyes, I saw it had angled sharply downriver. “Pull again,” I shouted back to the soldiers on the bank. They did, but still nothing happened.

“Kobi, go along the main cable after him!,” I ordered. Kobi Meron was over six foot tall. He was the tallest and strongest guy around,originally from Tubul’s team, just came back from officer’s school. We

hooked him to the main cable, securing him with a third cable, thin one onto his belt. He began sliding across in hopes of finding Uri. Because the direction of the two cables connected to Uri was almost ***fully*** downstream Kobi was not far from the bank and not exposed to the full power of the stream as long as I could see him. Then he also disappeared into the darkness

under the hanging trees. These were the longest seconds I could recall up to that time in my life. It probably didn’t take more than fifteen seconds before we heard a weak shout overcoming the raging water sounds, “ pull back!”. which we did. Within another ten seconds Kobi, hugging Uri, still connected to his thin security cable where on the bank.

in his hands seconds, he did. Uri was losing a battle to keep his head above the river. He was taking in water. He was barely breathing. With the main cable tangled around his midsection, every time we had tried to pull him back, we'd been tightening a vise around his waist. Kobi immediately cut him loose, and wrapped his powerful arms around him. "Pull!" he called, his plea

only just barely audible. We did, bringing both of them back.

Uri had by now stopped breathing. One of the men on my *shilutz* was a guy named Rafi Friedman, who I'd included because he was a trained paramedic. Rafi told one of the others to prop Uri over his knee, face down, while he pressed harder and harder on his back in hopes of clearing

his air passages. I couldn’t help at this stage. I just watched them ,and hoped for the better. Thoughts passed on my mind, of myself having to tell Uri’s mother and the family, which I knew so well, what happened, if worse come to worst. The whole debacle(what part is the debacle? The whole story?.EB.] had lasted barely a minute or two. But finally, first in weak gasps and then

gradually deeper, Uri began to breathe again. The operation, that night of course , cancelled. We had to climb up the gorge, now carrying Uri on a stretch, at least alive.

It was only later, that we learnt that Uri, while being violently dragged after the anchor lost grip of the other bank, tried to cut the main cable with his knife while already under water, but

couldn’t because somehow the main cable turned around him over his hands. The more we pulled the worst it get and more water he swallowed. Kobi cut him out of this knot ad theywere carried out on their respective thin safety cables.

He spent nearly a month in the hospital. In our repeated efforts to pull him loose, we had damaged one of his kidneys. When I began visiting him, a

day after he was admitted, the doctors told me he was urinating blood. But with his mix of physical strength and determination, he was back to something near full health within a week or two. They kept him for a further week, to make sure he'd suffered no lasting damage. Incredibly, he hadn't. He, and we, were lucky he had survived at all.

We had learned a further, frightening lesson in fording rivers: even our makeshift anchor system was dangerously inadequate. By the next time we crossed the gorge, we had developed aluminum bridge, which we assembled in six-feet-long components, of triangular cross section structure and, once assembled, arc-like overall shape. twenty yards altogether, on our side of the

river, then we connected ‘our end’ to a gimbel attached on top of a plate which was well anchored to the ground, and still fully on our side of the river, helped by four nylon cables attached to the bridge’s further end’ we raised it gradually to a fully vertical position 18 yards tall (not 20, because of the arc-like shape), and then, as slowly as we could, allowed it to fall/land

down on the soft dense mulberry tangle on the far bank. The control, when it stood tall was easy, but toward the end you lost leverage on it and it fell quite uncontrolled. The trade-off for its lightness was that it could handle at most 250 pounds of weight in its broad middle section. This meant only one of us could cross it at a time, slowly crouching on four, holding to the triangular

aluminum structure. The great advantage however was that you could cross it dry. Dryness affected pace and effectivity all along the rest of the operation.

{{[EB. That belongs to a third version, years later, made of aerial structures materials which was heavier.EB.]}}And since there was no way we could carry the

components down the incline from Kfar Hanassi into the gorge, we needed to spend an extra day transporting it to the near bank of the river. We used a civilian truck. In case we were discovered, which we never were, we posed as Golan beekeepers. The bridge components, in burlap sacks, were wedged into the front of the truck’s storage area. Piled on top was a full complement of

mesh masks, padded gloves, and beehives.[EB. Till here.]}}

As for Uri Zakai, He is alive and well, A retired Col.,over 75, with good kidneys and a hobby. Rowing in a single person kayaks, along big rivers. He just finished a 1500 miles rowing trek along the Danube and plans now a longer one along the Yukon River in Canada.

* * *

If our first failure came moments away from tragedy, the second, to borrow Karl Marx’s line about history, was closer to [(?).EB.]farce. It did not seem that way at the time, however, especially since it was part of a further shift in focus for the sayeret in which I was again chosen to play a central role.

Our Syria missions had ended Israel’s self-imposed intelligence moratorium on the Golan. But the more recent trauma of Rotem – and our obvious vulnerability to a surprise mobilization by the Egyptians – remained unresolved. Fixing this was going to be a tougher challenge. As we had discovered in our failed training exercise with the Bedouin tracking unit

in the Negev a couple of years earlier, merely traveling undetected through the desert was not easy. Transporting and installing a complex intercept system in the Sinai was going to be doubly difficult. Still, Meir Amit was convinced Israel’s security depended on finding a way to do it. He had been forced to abandon our earlier plan to tap directly into a communications cable in

the Sinai. The refrigerator-sized equipment, and our patent inability to operate undetected, made it unworkable.

Amit, was a practical leader who had the courage and stamina to drive ideas into realities. He ordered the investment of a major fraction of all Aman budget into the project of developing a set of much smaller and energy effective system that will replace the

unworkable old version and will make an operation possible. Amit made it THE main effort of the Israeli Intelligence corps from mid 62’ to early 64’. It was now April 63’ and ~~But~~ now, he was intent on trying again.

The first I heard about the decision was from Avraham, even before I left for ~~when I got back from~~ France. He asked me to fill him in on the abandoned scheme I’d worked on as part of

the Amsalem team, when he’d been away at staff college. I described how we had trained under Tel Aviv manhole covers on communications cables, and how the size and weight of the device we’d been shown by the technology unit had brought things to a halt. But I added that the technology wasn’t the only problem. We had failed, spectacularly, in our exercise

with the *Shaked* scout unit in the Negev.

Avraham, following Amit, believed ~~was convinced~~ the operation was possible, in part because the technology had moved on. More importantly, he was personally friendly with the commander of the Israeli air force's helicopter squadron. A year earlier,62', following a visit to Israel of the German Min. of

Defense ,Franz Joseph Strauss, a Bavarian and good friend of Israel, Germany ‘donated over 20~~They had taken delivery of~~ US-made, Sikorsky S-58s, which could carry about 2200 pounds,a much greater load than the S-55 which preceded it, not to mention the tiny French ‘Alouette’ chopper they had before ~~older aircraft~~ in their fleet.And the squadron, especially its legendary

commander Uri Yarom, was eager to find some way to participate in a *real* **operation**. **Avraham** was convinced he **will** take any **conceivable risk to make this happen.** –it was supposed to be a new 'first' we, the Israeli armed forces, had never launched at the time any heliborne operation. ~~I was tempted to point out that we'd never used helicopters in an operation. But~~ Avraham knew

> that. We already trained with them quote often. They dropped us in remote places, during the exercise with ‘Shaked” and in many other opportunities. Never in enemy area.~~So I said simply, and not a lot less obviously, that we’d have to train on them.~~

> “It’s by far the greatest challenge we’d ever thought of or faced. No one ever did it. Not just the flight, that’s Uri

Yarom job. But preparing , then executing such a task a whole night deep into Egypt, is really testing. I believe we can do it. But , I want you and your team to do it. And results will depend on you.~~’m sure the operation is possible,” he repeated. “And I’m sure that you are the one to do it.~~” It was a daring choice, carrying a complement together with a demanding burden for me. My

team was just nine month into service, deep into their basic special forces training. Younger team wont make it on time. Mine will hardly do. Tubul’s team was already reservists. Only Yori’s team was more senior, they had only 9 months left, and were about to complete two and half years and get their final 30 days off, on January 64’. At the time there were no known

practices to keep them in service beyond the rules and Avraham was deeply worried about it. By today standards, we heavily underestimated the task and made daring assumptions about, the level of operational ripeness needed, the timeframes needed for technological skills to be acquired, and the dificulties which might appear along the way and during execution.

Living through hyper-dynamic embryonic stages of evolution of a special forces unit, for critical missions, never taken, all this made us over-optimists out of lack of experience.

I told Avraham, I'll be glad to take it. I raised the question whether I had to cancel the planned trip to France. Avraham opposed the idea. He argued we won't have the 'new' systems before

September, if at all. And that the relations with the Centurions , as he called them are of extreme importance for other reasons, I’m not supposed to be aware of. We ended up agreeing that Kobi will take my team for those two months.

We assumed we wont be able to take more than six people, thus decided to prepare eight, just in case. ~~I assembled a five-man team.~~ I picked Kobi

Meron as my deputy commander and six ~~three~~ of the youngsters from my own team. We started training immediately. But this was clearly going to take time: as it turned out, more than eight months. We never worked on any of our other operations more than few weeks, sometimes spread over several months. To allocate a whole team for a task without limits have been tried only once, The Amsalem

Squad and was stopped long before it reached even four months. And since the intelligence void signaled by Rotem was still gaping, Amit decided we should try a shorter-term fix in the meantime. He wanted us to revisit the failed attempt to plant a bug on a telephone pole in the Gaza Strip. This was the place were a year earlier following the debacle with the

Ghazantime, rather than entrust it to a double agent,a furious Amit shouted at his senior staff: “next operation, in spite of all burdens of memories (meaning Uri Ilan), will be executed by Israeli Soldiers” And that was the turning point ,into operations, of Sayeret Matkal.it would be done by _Sayeret Matkal. Amit knew that even if we succeeded, a Gaza phone intercept would

not provide a fail-safle warning of Egyptian troop moves in the Sinai. But he believed, duly so, hop ed that if something truly major was afoot, units in Gaza would at least have to be told something of what was was going on.

This would be the first time Israeli soldiers had operated in Gaza since leaving Gaza following before the 1956 operationwar. The reluctance

was understandable. Beyond the danger of running into Egyptian police or soldiers, Gaza was, even then, although much more so by now ~~as now~~, one of the most densely populated slivers of coastline on the planet. We chose a place very close to the place the double agent was supposed to plant it. There were too few places, both empty and electronically possible. ~~Still, we did have a slight~~

~~head start in the planning. From the mission by the double agent, we knew which telephone line, indeed which telephone pole, to target~~. The bugging device we'd be installing was the same as well.

I included the three of the six guys I destined to the~~from my~~ Sinai team in the Gaza mission as well. Since Kobi would be busy continuing those preparations, I added Avi Telem

as my deputy, just as he'd been on the first Golan mission. We did some additional planning for Gaza. But for a variety of reasons – including, no doubt, a misplaced (?)overconfidence from our successes on the Golan – it was nothing like (?)as thorough as it should have been. I figured we knew where we were going. The telephone pole was only two miles past the border, near the old

British-built railway line. There were no rivers to cross. It was late summer, which did mean the night darkness would be shorter. There would be a sliver of a moon at the beginning of the night but we had to use every minute available. The night was short. ~~But I assumed we would be in and out within a few hours~~. The main unsettling~~only~~ question was what route to take beyond

~~once we crossed~~ the border to minimize our chances of being exposed along the way, which mightlead to cancelation of operation if it happened before we reached the target, or alternatively risk it being exposed next morning if it happened after we completed the mission, on our way home. We discussed it again and again. The choice was between an wineyard and orange groves with

some buildings among them, quite close to the path at some points. and an open areas of mainly watermelon patches(?). The final discussion took place at the office of the Southern Command commander, Zvika Zamir, later head of Mossad, he grew up before 48’ in Rehovot, a Jewish old Moshava, which was a major oranges and watermelon growers, surrounded till 48’ with arab villages doing the

same. He quite authoritatively predicted that in summer, the orange groves are better since the watermelons have to be protected against thieves. “Choose the orange grove,” he said. “At this time of year, they won’t bother posting guards. There’s nothing to steal.” I felt the same. Issue decided. ~~The fruit hadn’t come out yet on the orange trees, but the watermelons were~~

~~ripening and close to being taken to market. That seemed to favor the orange grove. To be safe, I asked the head of the southern command, who had grown up on a moshav that cultivated both oranges and watermelons. “Choose the orange grove,” he said. “At this time of year, they won’t bother posting guards. There’s nothing to steal.”~~

We entered Gaza ~~a~~immediately at darkness ~~little after ten at night~~. We were wearing Egyptian army uniforms, from the many dozens captured in the 1956 war. We~~I~~ even took the precaution of getting a few refresher sessions in Egyptian military vocabulary from our ~~my~~ old sayeret tutor. Still, I knew there were limits to our powers of disguise if we were spotted. We were carrying Uzis,

with the bizarrely outsized silencers which we had devised for them ~~.~~ and heavy big military communication device. We were afraid to use the same Motorola which the double agent used.

I led the way. Before reaching the orange grove, we had to go through a small vineyard. We crouched as we went. But a few yards in, we spotted someone slowly walking

some 20 yards from us along the low vines plants. As quietly as we could, we lay face down on the ground. The man came closer turned, and came within about 20 feet of us. He bolted his ancient-looking rifle. He could hardly~~not~~ fail to see us. Probably our unwieldy Uzis as well. But if he saw us, he must have concluded we weren't worth arguing with. ~~He~~ His rifle was in his right hand balanced

parallel to the ground and left hand close but not handling the rifle. It was bolted, we heard it . but if he will grab his rifle with the left hand and try to lower it, I'll shoot him first. Probably, someone else behind me as well. He stood looking towards us for some tense 20 seconds, than slowly turned 90 degrees and walked away in a totally normal gait~~wheeled and walked away~~. I

> decided to interpret it as a border case, the man probably ‘decided’ not to see us. If that’s the case he shouldn’t have any incentive to report it, which will make ***him*** the one who needs to explain his behavior.

In the orange grove, things got worse. There were no guards. But when we were about halfway in, two men, who appeared to have been lying on

the ground enjoying the night air, rose to their feet. “Who are you?” one of them asked me.we were one feet distance from each other. I naturally put my hand on his shoulder, the other guy looking at us from another foot distance. Then, I replied – with, I hoped, the confidence and authority of a real Egyptian officer – that we are from the Armed Forces,we’re on patrol.

I’m not sure he believed us, but before he could ask anything else, we walked on, Avi too uttered a brief greeting to them, as if we *were* an Egyptian military ~~security~~ unit. This one could hardly be defined as a border case. But I had decided to first of all continue in the same direction , namely into the Gaza strip in order not to raise further suspicion, and

decide ften minutes later in more quiet place.

The real trouble began just few minutes later, in the middle of the grove we had to cross a ~~on a roughly 100-yard~~ strip of dirt that led, between two orchard farm ~~low-slung~~buildings~~–~~, two stories each 50-60 yards afar in the two directions, but which we couldn’t see because of the trees~~buildings, to the railway~~

~~line~~. A couple of dogs started barking, one from each building. I motioned the team to get down, figuring we could wait for the yelping to stop. But it got louder. A minute later, the problem of the dogs became a problem of the dog *owner*. He literally stepped on Avi Telem. We all got to our feet. “Calm down,” I told him. “We’re Armed forces on patrol.” This time, however, there was

no avoiding the fact that we'd been seen, complete with our muffled Uzis and everything else, for the second time no more than 300 yards from the first place. Less than one hour into Gaza, the operation had failed. It was also an operational mistake of mine. Our usual rule was never stop at night when a dog barks close, he will keep barking and could bring a human being after

him. That’s ultimately what dogs are for.

We turned back. Avoiding the orange grove, we retreated through the alternative path, open areas and the watermelon patches. Without even getting close to the railway and the telephone line, to avoid exposing further the real objective of the operation. ~~watermelon patch.~~ We encountered not a single soul.

Nor a single dog. But early the next morning, ~~Israel's military observers on the border were approached by~~ the UN contingent put in place after the 1956 war,~~.~~ The peacekeepers, handed over to the Israeli Staff ~~them~~ a formal protest, alleging that Israel~~we~~ had violated the border arrangements and sent a military patrol into Gaza. Our officers asked :how do you know?~~indignantly denied this.~~

~~But one of~~ the UN officers replied: “~~I know~~ Yy~~~~our men were wearing Egyptian uniforms. But~~And~~ speaking Arabic. ~~But~~ with an extremely ~~obvious,~~ heavy, accent.”

My language tutor wasn’t even there to defend me.

We didn’t make any further operation into the Gaza Strip till we took it over in the 67’ war. The rest is history.

* * *

Fortunately, despite ribbing (?)from the rest of the unit about my linguistic faculties, I had more serious business to attend to. [EB.(If the Gaza fiasco[EB. I don’t think it was fiasco. It was a daring attempt to solve a problem we had, which ended up in failure to achieve its objective, but with quite an achievement of

avoiding a deterioration into fire exchange.].

Our failure in Gaza, Where the operation, under my command was, at least on some aspects, hastily ill prepared ,just re-emphasized the criticality of the challenge we are facing in Sinai ~~was ill prepared,~~. It was ~~our planning for~~ Israel's and The Units' ***first*** on so many levels: heliborne deep penetration, central

communication cable interception, misguiding the Egyptian Bedouins reconnaissance teams,(not to mention the formidable R&D task facing the Tech unit). Time was already emerging as a main constraint. We had at most seven month till the last date, late February 64’, where the final operation will have to take place or delayed for unknown later date.

Personalities really mattered at this fragile and full of doubts phase. There were quite a body of skeptics and opponents of the “adventure” of Amit and Avrema’leh, as Arnan was called at higher echelons, the possibility of sounding failure was very real. Schadenfreude was hanging in the air while the pretensious plan was presented at top levels . Amit had already

nominated Head of Mossad. Yet, mainly because of ‘The Adventure”, he insisted on staying simultaneously as Head of Aman (military Intelligence),

[EB. Consider:,responsible to make sure that the project he invested so much energy, budgets and personal attention in, will materialize. Will fly.EB.]

Avraham, also was about to end, in the spring of 64’, two years of his second stint as commander of The Unit, and will have to leave as well.

~~attempt to tap into Egyptian military communications in the Sinai~~ We already had behind us the achievements in the Syrian [EB. that’s the right name to be used until 67’EB.] Heights, but that was far from a critical mass of support and

recognition to ensure the forward irresistible momentum~~left~~ we dreamed of and worked for.

Having been through many years of “operational drought” as a result of single event blunders, I was, we were, convinced that if this project will be grounded for the second time in two years it will probably never fly. We might be

grounded, or at least severely constrained as well.

I've set aside ~~no detail uncovered, no foreseeable obstacle unaddressed. I was aware that it was *unforeseen* dangers that might doom us to failure. Yet I set aside~~ an half-A4-sized notebook and, week by week, sometimes day by day filled it with lists of action items, ~~and~~ tables and

diagrams, determined to make sure we missed nothing.

M~~I took m~~y team had already spent time with Kobi, when I was in Mont Louis,**through the s**imiliar**~~ame~~ phone-cable training I'd done under the streets of Tel Aviv a couple of years earlier. It was easier to arrange this time. We had co-opted several men from the phone company into the** Tech Unit**~~sayeret~~ itself. But the**

more deeply I got into the preparations for the mission, the more complex it seemed to become. In preliminary meetings with the technology unit, I could see they had devoted a huge effort to turning their prototype into something that would work. The interception and transmission unit they were trying to build now **was not quite so enormous. Now, it looked like a** ~~slightly slimmed-~~

~~down refrigerator~~big suit case, a pair of 20” on 20” cube-like loudspeakers and half a dozen of smaller heavy cases full of batteries and a lot of electric and telephone cab les all covered into flexible protective tubes, against rodents and the elements. **Yet as I pressed them to see whether they could prune it further, I realized I was getting things backwards.** In

fact they made it clear, that I won’t have a ***real*** system to train with anywhere before, hopefully, thelast few weeks before operation. I had to settle to an inert replica made of metal and plastics, with identical wehihgts, connectors and other interfaces between the sub-units. **Before I could know what needed** to be modified~~changing~~ **by the technical experts, I would have**

to identify, one by one, the obstacles we were likely to face on the ground.

The most daunting of them was obvious: the need to get into the Egyptian desert, perform a complex operation on an underground cable and return to Israel without any sign of our presence. We knew from our Sinai Bedouin agents, there are daily patrols of Egyptian soldiers accompanied by local

Bedouins along the cables. It was not against a possible Israeli Intelligence operation. It was against the local tribes who used to dig into the cable trench and steal long pieces of it for the copper wires they melted by burning it on the tar wrapping of the cable, and later sold it. Two years earlier, we had failed to outwit the *Shaked* Israeli Bedouins scouts in the Negev.

If we couldn’t find a solution to that problem, the technology issues would be irrelevant. ~~We might be discovered by Egyptian troops while we were working on the cable. Even if we didn’t get found out immediately,~~ Egyptian cable patrols/scout units would surely spot what we had been up to and find the system within a matter of day or twos.

I approached the challenge in the same way I'd taught myself to pick locks. I tried to break it down into a series of experiments and figure out, by trial and error, a solution. Over a period of many weeks~~onths~~ stretching well into the late summer~~fall~~, I~~I~~ spent dozens of days in the Negev with my team, moving to certain points which were pre selected by our best geologists and air

photos interpreters to represent the kinds of soil we might find in five or six points along the cable which we were considering as potential working points, based on their quality as transmitting points with the best possible line of sight to some point inside the Negev, in Israel. And also based on their distance from any identifiable Bedouin, present or past tent or herds

shepherding activities, as well as Egyptian military activity~~from one area to another, selecting those where the soil seemed most like the Sinai~~. On each such a site w~~W~~e began by removing an inch or two of the topsoil, trying to disturb it as little as possible. Next, we'd simulate the digging ~~the kind of cable~~ work we would be doing~~ in the Sinai~~. Closed the digged hole

with its own soil. Then, we would shape the ssurface carefully to a contour, similar to the one it had before and spread again~~replace~~ the top layer of sand, dust or soil.

But just replacing the sand was not enough. We experimented with a range of “grooming” techniques, trying out “brushes” crafted from~~–~~ fine hair to light feathers~~tree branches and plants. Once we’d~~

~~got through that stage, I worked on mapping out, first on paper and then in our heads, the exact configuration of any pebbles or twigs, or evidence of earlier foot or vehicle traffic, at the sites where we were working~~. At the start of each new session in the Negev, I'd return to the sites we'd used before, to check whether the elements, or the mere passage of time, had betrayed

our presence. WE did it in full light at the beginning, to gradually learn from our own failures and realize the limits of what we could expect in different soils. As we matured a bit, as if all of this weren’t difficult enough, we’d been doing it at night. And coming early morning to watch the results. A whole operational new/”green” field/skill started to emerge.

We could not assume that our very walking through several miles on each direction will not be identified by either the patrols along the cables and the roads we had to cross, or by a Bedouin living in the area which will report to the authorities of his suspicious findings, tne same way the civilians we met during the Gaza operation did. ~~Every one of those marks would need to be~~

~~replicated. We went through a similar process~~

~~O~~On desert trails and while crossing roads, ~~since that's~~ where the patrols, Bedouins and (?)scouts would look for the first signs of intruders. We needed to leave ~~–~~an impression of 'legitimate' military or Bedouin activity that has a natural beginning and end if someone walks along it on either direction, ~~any area where~~

~~we walked or worked looking the same as before. As if all of this weren't difficult enough, we'd be doing it at night.~~

The real test would come in a full-scale exercise against Sayeret ~~with~~ *Shaked, our own top experts on following foot tracks*. But I didn't want to risk that before I was confident we were ready. Week after week, we refined our ~~tools and~~ techniques of

disguise. ~~At the start of each new session in the Negev, I'd return to the sites we'd used before, to check whether the elements, or the mere passage of time, had betrayed our presence.~~ We tried out more and more elaborate tricks~~strategies~~ for disguise. I can not even now, responsibly, go into all of them. ~~For crossing a road, we added a new tool to our grooming arsenal – small,~~

~~battery-operated fans – to ensure that the thin covering of sand looked undisturbed. When we went off-road, we looked for spots where there were rocks or even boulders, minimizing the need to walk on the sand. When we did travel on sand, we practiced walking in loops or figure-eights, or walking backwards, to prevent trackers from establishing any useful pattern in our~~

~~footprints.~~ We even added final twist, by including the use of mock plastic “feet” worn like a sock or soft boot, specially produced of flexible rubber – like material by our Tech (sister) Unit ~~from a toy store in Tel Aviv~~ to create the impression of going barefoot.

Finally, I felt we were ready for *Shaked*. Our Negev exercise lasted ~~four days and~~ four nights and their following

morning,~~,~~ using different areas~~, so we'd have to deal with a variety of soil consistency, ground cover and topography~~. Two squads from my team were using the new techniques, another two squads totally unaware of our techniques used the old paradigm. This time, the Shaked scouts never found 'my' two squads. They found on each days' morning the other two

squads and were relatively happy with it.~~us.~~ They've used to drive early morning along the main unpaved roads cutting across the block of 25 on 25 miles allocated for that night , and identified almost every new footprints which was created along last night and usually followed them for some length to determine whether they are normal or suspicious. For sure, among them, they

usually identified ‘my’ two squads foot prints. But then, even when they followed them till the ‘beginning ‘or ‘end’ or till they can not find them anymore there was no hint of anything which did not seem normal civilian or Bedouin activity or just unsuspicious footprints that were accidentally lost. —On the last night, I was feeling so confident we are in control of

what we'd achieved, I took time out for a more early-vintage sayeret excursion. I led the squad, one of "my' two, which I personally led ~~my team~~ into a kibbutz called Lahav, north of Beersheva. I picked the lock on the garage, borrowed a tractor, and drove us into another paved road several miles apart where we left the Tractor and walked another mile or so on the road before finding a rocky soil we

could use to get out off the road without leaving any footprint at all. Shaked couldn’t find us that night either. The results drew a genuine sigh of relief out of me.~~town for dinner.~~

The fact that we are approaching an important moment of decision was clear on all levels. The same way that just a year earlier, before taking a decision to risk few firsts in

the Syrian Heights, the instinct at the top of the Army was to let us prove we are ready for the task by the ‘proving operation’ in Lebanon, now, once again, with many more firsts, and much more to lose if it will fail, we were asked to prove, together with our air force that we can have a cross border heliborne operation without being exposed the next morning, ‘caught with our pants

down’.This time the idea was more direct, namely: go directly to the same place you want to go in the *real* operation, lighter, more flexible without any criminalizing equipment or footprint. If it’s going to fail/exposed, we did not risk a lot and better to know it now. If it succeeds, we know that at least at this corner we can give a chance for the *real*

thing. Moreover, once we run it this way, the ‘trial operation’ can also be used to acquaint ourselves with the area, to go to the operational point, chose the exact point where the ‘cosmetics’ of the surface could be optimal. Then, having a small directional transmitter with us we could send a signal at exactly the right direction eastward into Israel and measure there (in Har Keren)

the loss the signal suffers in the air along the concrete trajectory which will be later used by the system. We could also bring some soil samples from the surface to be analysed later in order to judge the energy loss from transmitting from under the ground. None of these can ever be done without being there. And it could even help the fine-tuning and calibration of the system to

optimize its’ power consumption and other technicalities.

we didn’t take the system replica. We couldn’t even carry it. We will be lighter and faster. We also chose a landing area slightly apart from where we planned to land during the real operation. But in every other respect, it was close to the real thing. It was mid August. Hot and dry evening, when we piled into the

helicopter and lifted off from a improvised launching pad in the Negev. The pilot was Uri Yarom, the man who founded and led the helicopter force of Israel. Graduate of Ben Shemen , a Palmach fighter in 48’, a great story and jokes teller and a close friend of Avraham, a visionary of heliborne operations future. It was his last operational flight before he had to leave and been

promoted, co-pilot ,navigator was Rafi Sivron, extremely focused , wise and capable person I learned to appreciate, it was *their first* operational penetration with a force to be landed in an enemy area. There was almost half moon , still for few hours. We flew very low, probably 200’ feet over the ground. I followed mesmerized the passing landscape underneath. Within

some ten minutes we could see Gebel Libni ahead of us and few minutes later we've landed. Before leaving, I climbed on to the cockpit and shook the hand of Uri, shouting to overcome the engine noise: "Uri, Thanks. Finally, you did it!". The helicopter dropped us 25 miles into the Sinai, several miles east of the area we chose for the operation. I was for the first time in Sinai. My first

impression was of the somewhat reddish ground colour, probably because of the touch of moonlight. Secondly, how far you could see, Sinai is so open and big, we could easily see the shade of Gebel Meghara, some fifteen miles to the west, and even Gebel Hilal, almost thirty miles to the south. Thirdly, the total quiet and serene-like atmosphere. We walked fast. I tried to

memorize the picture knowing we plan to come again to the same place. The ground was mainly Hamada, solid, covered with small slivers of silicates stones. flat , but smoother than in the Negev. Here and there some lonely low bush and a curved “tail’ of bright yellow sand around it , stretched towards the winds’ direction. From about two miles from the road we could see from

time to time a lonely car driving along the road it lights change directions as it drives through the curves in the road south of Bir Lahfan. We knew, the moment a car coming from the north, made it’s last turn and stabilized on a southward course, that’s was our place to go. We reached it in some 45 minutes, and some disguising track maneuvers, be fore crossing the road to the

other side and get closre to our chosen point. Close to the road there was much more sand dunes, however shallow and low, than Hamada. I could easily see the direction and trajectory(?) of the cable. Even years after being digged , because of the dry weather, you can see the path of the trench, cut off, luckily enough ffor us by heavier dune-like tails of bright sand, one of them we

chose to be the site for our future digging. I carefully judged it. It looked ok. I measured the direction to Har Keren and deployed the mini transmitter. Within several minutes we got approval of the signal being caught in the command post. I planned the cosmetics, wiyhout touchng the mini-dune and carefully took some Hamada soil from few yards aside. We couldn’t see the

Egyptian air force base of Gebel Libni. There was no single light from there. But we were some half a mile from it, in an almost flat area, we could notice the low contours of several low flat buildings and I was surprised to find how close the dog barkings from the airbase seemed to sound. We finished within some fifteen minutes. And started heading east. Some forty minutes into

the Hamada, I ordered the helicopter. twenty minutes later we heard it. We were already set the trapezoid of kerosene tiny torches which signal to the pilot the place and direction of expected landing. minutes later, the helicopter landed, raising more dust than I expected, given the solid ground. We climbed in . Short flight home. Mission accomplished. The name

of the operation was Halutz, Hebrew for Pioneer. It was a literal one.flew back in and collected us.

Only one thing had gone wrong: one of us had lost half of his plastic foot somewhere along the way. But if anyone noticed a small toe and fingers emerges out of much bigger foot print, we got no hint of it from the Egyptians in the days that followed.

> Operation Halutz, significantly improved our sense of confidence regarding the preparations for the coming operation. Many questions lost their question marks. You just asked yourself what have you seen there and what should be done.

I remained less confident about rest of the operation. Beginning in September 1963, we held an overnight exercise

every two weeks and a full-scale simulation once a month. The simulation was always on the eighth night of the lunar cycle, with moonlight for the first[EB. Second time. First was Halutz in Aug 63’.EB.] few hours of the evening. For the first time ever in Israel Sayeret Matkal, we would be going in by helicopter.) The chopper couldn’t risk flying in total darkness. We trained with

the same pilot, now it was the new squadron commander Haim Naveh, a solid reliable highly capable pilot, and same crew who would be flying us into the operation ~~Sinai~~. By now, Capt. Sivron, the co-pilot who took upon himself again the navigation task, already used to navigate like night-time commando officer, following every curve of each wadi which he rehearsed by heart, an hour

for every 3 minutes of flight, in advance , rather than just taking directions, speed and time, as pilots usually did.

I thought that in order to instill in my team the self confidence that we control our fate whatever happens I need another exercise. Avraham and Amit both thought it goes too far, even raised their eyebrows. But I insisted on doing it.~~organized a further~~

~~exercise to~~ Ss~~s~~imulate a situation in which the helicopter, for whatever reason, failed to show up to take us back. This involved walking over two nights some 35 miles, using all our tested techniques ~~strategies~~ of disguise, and hiding in daytime, we simulated it by a night trek from the west~~one~~ edge of the Negev to the east one~~other~~. At certain~~one~~ point,

I broke up the team so that each of us could test hisour ability to navigate hisour way back, alone, if we got separated for whatever reason. I was deeply convince of the compelling. It was a lesson I'd got from my time in Mont Louis: the need to be supremely confident, going in, of our ability to handle any kind of challenge we might face.

Still, there remained one challenge which seemed beyond our control: the system equipment and the T junction. In someone of our exercises, ~~rather than just bury the apparatus at an agreed site,~~ we did a live test on a real telephone cable south of ~~near~~ Beersheva, in order to see whether the quality of our work stands the continuous quality control of telephone

communication that the national service keeps, or ,alas, is identified as a source of disruption which could then easily located.. By now, the team was ~~we were~~ well practiced in stripping off the outer layers from the cable, installing the T-exit, ~~and~~ connecting it to the intercept transmitter and close it . Out of basic caution we did not leave the system replica but

just a ‘dead end’ T-exit. That went smoothly. But the next day, very lucky for us at the end, it heavily rained. Within hours, the phone company got reports from all around the south west corner of Israel of phones malfunctioning, or inability to reach connection~~going dead~~. The company emergency teams ,located through remote measurements the approximate

location, then came to the place and found the strange T-exit quite professionally done, clearly not by them, but still cracked to its core, wet inside and the cable not functioning. It was my mistake. I chose the working point just few meters from a dry creek with a small low bridge over it. I preferred it since the cable was just five yards from the road and I looked for the cover of the low

bridge to protect us from being caught in the lights of passing cars.

Comes the heavy rain, the strong current widened the stream. It now reached to the T-exit and, under the drag of the water arced it to the point of cracking the covered T-exit welded lead with epoxy wrapping. The ‘Post Service Team’ of reservists in the Tech unit had to invent some hardly

concievable story to hide what really happened~~fended off the complaints as best it could. We hurried back, removed the T, and restored the cable~~. But even allowing for the fact that it rained more in the Negev than in the Sinai, we obviously had to come up with a solution.

I went to see the people in the technology unit the next morning. I was now meeting them at least every week or so,

usually at their headquarters near~~in~~ Tel Aviv, late Friday afternoon, but sometimes in the clubhouse at ~~Kav Chamesh~~ The Unit. With each new exercise, I had begun adding to a list of fixes or changes I felt we'd need in the equipment. The rainproofing was the latest, and was obviously critical. It took them a few days, but they came back with proper T-shaped ~~a small~~ stainless steel~~wire~~

casge, and little pots of a specially produced epoxy. The idea was for us to paint several coats of the epoxy around the T-junction. Then we'd enclose the whole messy, pungent glob in the steel cage. We would then ~~wrap a rubber covering around the cage and~~ apply further coats of the epoxy.

Yet the main problem with the equipment had still not

gone away. We thought the Tech unit will make it smaller. They really tried hard. But with 64’s technology? It was already early September. We were still waiting. It was still ~~too~~ big, and weighing some 1100 pounds, much too heavy for five of us to carry. The overall weight the S-58 could take, beyond its own crew and other essentials was just 2200 pounds, thus a team of five

with full gear was the upper limit for manpower. With the clock ticking down towards the tentative date for the operation, in February 1964, and choice of operational point noe already clarified, –there was no way our team was going to be able to get it from the landing area to the site of the ~~Sinai~~ cable along the road, nearly three miles away.

The solution, when it came, owed– to Amits' management style more than to a systematic analysis of the options. ~~more to luck than logic. Late one night, we were drinking thick Arabic coffee in the sayeret clubhouse. A couple of~~ Meir Amit, since we started working on it, made a habit of dropping to The Unit every month to directly hear from me and Avraham how we move forward and

what might block us. He was determined to make sure nothing will stop us. He now came again, but for some reason brought with him this time, his senior Aman Staff. Probably they were visiting some other unit before, probably Amit wanted to impress them, or mobilize them all to support the project. They were some some six full Colonels and one or two Brig. Generals. With

proffessions spreading from Legal and financial advisers to several administrative officers and the Tech unit commander with few of his people. I presented the open challenges and a totally open brainstorming started. When a colonel of some administrative or manpower responsibility in the HQ, asked permission to talk and said: Why don’t you build a light weight rickshaw

that could enter through the Helicopter door and carry, once on the ground, all or most of the equipment. It was immediately clear he hit it right. Within days we had the first version of the rickshaw made of air industry light tubes and arranged to be dragged by two soldiers.~~'s Aman officers were with us, along with a half-dozen people from the technology unit. We kept~~

batting the problem back and forth. “We can’t *carry* this thing,” I insisted, at least the twentieth time I’d made the point over the past few weeks. It was then that one of the tech guys said: “OK. We’ll have to build a cart.” Obvious problems with that idea surfaced as we discussed it. The contraption would have to be small enough to fit in the hold of the helicopter. It took

just one field exercise with the rickshaw ,a real helicopter, the system replica and all the equipment to realize that the two wheels rickshaw necessarily leaves extremely zig-zaging tracks in the sand, This will certainly draw attention from anyone who sees it. Secondly, two people could not drag it in the kind of ground we are to deal with, we need a cart to be dragged by

all four available soldiers. Thirdly, the width and the print of the wheels should simulate a common vehicle, preferably military Russian made jeep. Once again the Tech unit showed its edge when urgency emerged. Over the same weekend a totally new, four wheels cart was ready, dragged with nylon belts around the four human ‘horses’. It’s two axis change their width

outwards telescopically, once it get out of the narrow chopper door to reach exactly the width of the Egyptian, Russian made, jeeps we had in The Unit (plunder (?) from 56’ war), the wheels themselves, the lightest wide wheels we could find, were the nose wheels of the Fuga Magister, a French training jet used by our air force. And to complete the disguise the wheels wore an

Egyptian Jeep tread sandals, wrapped and glued to each wheel.~~would have to be a narrow two-wheeler, built of lightweight metal tubing. And what about the wheels, assuming we could even steer it reliably? The tire treads would be the equivalent of shouting to the Egyptians that we'd been there. I can't remember who came up with the answer. I think it was one of the~~

~~intelligence officers. But it was perfect. The cart would be exactly as wide as a Russian jeep, the same model the Egyptian army used. Its narrow frame, which would get it into the helicopter, would be built to telescope outwards after we landed. It would have four wheels, not two. And for the tires, we'd simply take a set from one of the Egyptian jeeps we had captured in 1956.~~

* * *

~~It was now time to simulate the one part of the operation we could not duplicate in the Negev: the nighttime crossing into Egypt. We didn’t take our “Jeep” with us. It wasn’t ready yet. We also chose a landing area well away from where the cable junction was. But in every other respect, it was~~

~~close to the real thing. We took the T-junction, the steel box and the epoxy. It was late December, a cool evening but dry, when we piled into the helicopter and lifted off from a base in the Negev. The pilot dropped us 20 miles into the Sinai, a couple of miles south of the real area where we'd be working on the cable. Once he left us, we headed even further away from the cable, another~~

~~mile or so, and began digging about three feet into the sand, the depth we would need in order to expose the cable. We prepared and buried the T-connector and the transmitter. Then, we removed it all again, covering our traces as we'd practiced, and made our way back to the pickup point. A few minutes later, the helicopter flew back in and collected us.~~

~~Only one thing had gone wrong: one of us had lost a big plastic foot somewhere along the way. But if anyone noticed a stray child's toy, we got no hint of it from the Egyptians in the days that followed.~~

As the February target date drew even nearer, the importance of the Sinai mission to everyone involved became increasingly clear. It was attracting muche~~ven~~ more

interest from the upper reaches of the military than our first mission on the Syrian HeightsGolan. Rather than install a fairly small unit on a telephone pole close to the front, we would try tobe tapping directly into one of the main military communications cables in the Sinai. Not just Avraham Arnan and Meir Amit were taking a daily, sometimes hourly,

interest. To observe our final simulation exercise in the Negev, in January 1964, the new chief-of-staff, Yitzhak Rabin, sent his chief of operations, Chaim Bar-Lev, as an observer.

The last run-through was a disaster, mostly because we got delayed after the helicopter dropped us more than a mile from where we had planned. ~~on~~ Landing well into a deep dune. Secondly, the cable was

extremely deep at the placed we worked. By the time we located the part of the Israeli phone cable where we were going to install the intercept, we were two hours behind schedule. That spelled potential disaster if it happened in the Sinai. Bar lev looked at us, frustratingly trying to move the cart forward and seemed genuinely disturbed. Try to explain to him that you've seen, first hand, the

shallow dunes in Sinai and although probably there are troubles waiting us there, ***This*** one is ***not*** one of them. Bar lev came once again, few days later to another exercise, this time it did not include flight and full distance cart pulling, but he was a seasoned professional and noticed how much ahead of what he had seen just few days before, we seemed to be now. Realizing that this couldn’t

have happened in the recent four days, Bar-lev understood we are in a better place than his own assessment just few days ago. Amit was disappointed of the first poor show, but never swayed on his conviction that the operation, our code name was “Caine”,it now got a formal name “ Operation Shrakrak” (a kind of small singing bird), That this operation should and would be

executed/happen, turning a long time dream into reality.

~~Worse, the technological unit now began to get cold feet. They warned Amit that even if the operation went off perfectly, they weren't sure the intercept signal would be strong enough to reach the Aman receiving station – atop Mount Keren, in the Negev, some 20 miles away. Yet despite rumblings that the mission~~

might even be cancelled, Amit held his ground. So did Avraham. He seemed unruffled by the technology team’s last-minute doubts. It was just human nature, he said. They were covering their backsides in case the equipment didn’t work.

We got the formal go-ahead in mid-February, six days before we were due to set off.

The chrome molibden

tubes~~aluminum~~ cart had been polished~~built~~. For the first time we've seen and touched the operational system. \we connected and then disconnected it only once, outside the 'clean room' in the Tech unit place. It looked really cool. Elegant grey matt, hard plastic. Fine looking padlocks(?). Rectangular shapes, with slightly curved corners, high quality

connectors. ~~,~~ ~~and we had trained on it in the Negev.~~ The ‘suitcase luggage, two ‘loud speakers’ and half a dozen battery packs, together with the Stainless steel case, ~~The “refrigerator” had been slimmed down considerably, though it still~~ weighed now about ~~more than~~ 900 pounds, the cart weighed another 150,and our working tools and equipment another 350. We’d been almost

200 pounds overweight. Haim Naveh, the squadron commander and his team proven real friends in need. Analyzing every peace of equipment on board of the chopper, with tortured faces, they took decisions and found the way to approve take off with those carefully weighted equipment. ~~300 pounds.~~ Our backpacks were crammed full with everything from ~~flashlights to electric~~

~~fans~~, digging~~our~~ tools, flashlights, huge sheets of brazened (?), our nylon~~rubber~~ seals for the steel cage, and the epoxy. We also had a metal detector, ordered from a hobby shop in the US for gold rush dreamers, though we hoped not to need it. We knew ~~– or were almost sure that we knew~~ – where the cable was~~. Even though the Egyptians had laid it years earlier, aerial~~

~~photographs showed a faint line where the shallow ditch had been dug to hold it~~. All these except for our personal gear , weapons, communication set and binoculars were packed on the cart. Lowering it, later on, down from the helicopter door, in a controlled manner, by the five of us and the support of one crew member, was extremely demanding and somewhat a risk.

In the last few days before the operation a forward command post disguised as a routine, low key, administrative field site was deployed in several wooden huts on Mount Keren. In the last day before operation even a set of VHF antennas had been set on Har Keren. Another joint airforce/ Sayeret dispatch deployed deeper south at a low altitude place with some very short strip to set

the take off station for the heavy helicopter to deploy next day.

The antenaes on Mount Keren were already built, When the leaders of the electronics team in the Tech Unit approached Avraham: ‘Look , they told him, we developed and built the best system we could. It’s top of the (?)line system. Our people are already driving it together with the cart and other

equipment to The Unit Base, where it will be loaded around 3pm on the Chopper.

However ,out of responsibility, we went again through all our calculations regarding the prospected signal strength under different wave-propagation conditions.(which, they did not detail, ***I add it now***, depend on variety of aspects, like temperature ,air and ground humidity, minerals

in the soil, weather ,solar wind activities and half a dozen others, last not least, the micro cross section of the ground surface and the depth of buried transmitter along the first ten yards of the propagation ‘line of sight’ towards the receiver.). The bottom line, they added, is that we can not assure you that, even if the operation is successful ,we will be able to

effectively hear the telephone conversations over the cable, thus,produce intelligence out of it.

I was at the height of last day preparations. All personal equipment already besides us. My last briefings to the team, and joint briefing with the heliborne Hilutz about to start. Operation itself starts in some ten hours, when Avraham sent to call me to his office.

He also had to carry out last preparations for his command post. Many of them were about to leave on the roads to Har Keren in short time. He told me about the Electronics team conversation with him. I asked him, who talked to you? He gave the name, and added: ‘its on behalf of all three leaders’. The person he mentioned was really a genius engineer, personally responsible for many

of the breakthroughs of the last two years, which enabled us to reach up to here. I was not yet a student of physics, but out of curiosity was much more deeply involved with the engineers and scientists who worked on it, than Avraham or anyone else of us. I spent days in the Tech unit Library in the last year diving through years crop of IEEE and other engineering publications for

hints on anyone on earth who might deal with transmitting low output VHF signals from underneath the ground or anything similiar, from tunnels, underground transportation systems or deep mining activities. I followed the Tech unit employing the best scientists of the nation in the attempt to overcome the hurdles, of effective antenaes and energy balances. I knew

that Avraham doesn’t have but his intuitions. He looked at me and like thinking loudly said: I tend to continue. “Go ahead!” I responded, “We’ll do the same”. It was only after the operation was completed that I came to know that Avraham did not talk to neither the Tech unit commander or to Meir Amit about thisdevelopment, ahead of the operation. Just before taking off from The Unit, we

took a picture with the helicopter crew, their plane in the background, my team, and several others, including Avraham and MHZ. The engineers, as well as their commander are all in the picture. Avraham mentioned to me the ‘second thoughts conversation’ few days later. Wandering loudly: ‘what a close call it were’, I responded: They are great professionals. And I assume

their concerns were real. However, at the bottom line level, it was not about science. It was about human nature, facing profound uncertainties and risks.

We took off, in moonlight, at about six thirty~~eight~~ at night. Minutes later, we _ crossed the border into Sinai.

[EB. Consider whether to pause hereand while shortly describing my Sinai team 9# of

my soldiers, to have an opportunity to tell something about the rest of them. EB]

[EB. Ned,Tim. Please note certain resonance of the thoughts in the following paragraph (about 350 words) with certain aspects of the Zionist Project as a whole. We shouldn’t say it. But let some readers find it themselves. EB.] We were five. Three of them ***my*** soldiers. I’ve trained

them from day 1. We were through everything in the last year plus. Knew and highly trusted each other. In today norms, we would have been still far from ripeness to take them into such risky and uncertain operation. But this was ***a*** *first*. We ourselves, Myself, Avraham, MHZ never been through such a long, multifaceted, effort of such extension with so much a stake. Full nine

months, or, if you count the previous round (Amsalem and Castel) full two and half years--- of preparations for one-night operation. That was something unheard of. And the night is tonight. We too, myself and Avraham included, underestimated the task, in an optimist, erupting drive to make it happen against whatever odds. The overriding feeling was: ‘No way we can’t do it!.

> If not one way, so let it be the other!. It’s too important to let it slip out of our hands!’

> Decades later, I sometimes found myself frustrated/regretting the gradual diminishing of that spirit.

> Surely, along the way ,many obstacles rose that surprised, even overwhelmed us. There were ups and downs , there were

setbacks. We had to maneuver, sometimes on the verge of the widely accepted norms, sometimes even beyond the line. We had to live with certain dissonance, and a lot of uncertainties. But we knew where we are heading and why. That’s what gave it all, a meaning. And true , we never took defeat as an option. And till now, it worked. The moment of truth had come now. Within

one night it’ll be over. I was confident. Yes, we can!.[EB. Till here.]

Achihud Madar, wonderful soldier, under all circumstances, whether navigating alone at night or shooting inside a building. Always in control of what he is doing and how it relates to what happens around. A Yemenite origin , living near Hadera. He was killed during the 73’ war

fighting on the Golan Heights, Syrian side with other Unit fighters, under Yori. Solid head over a pair of golden hands. Together with Nissim Jou’ari they will do all the technicaly sensitive part of ‘surgical-like operation to the T-exit and the cable. Nissim was brought up in Kibbutz Revivim in the Negev, where his brother was a member. He was perfect soldier of Morrocan

origin, fluent in French, quick mind and wonderful hands. For years later, Nissim was on a series of operational roles with Mossad. Oded Rabinovitch, from Kibbutz Dafna in the North.A yemenite mother and German origin father. Tall , thin, contemplative and very accurate in execution. Totally reliable soldier.

Kobi Meron. Strong and Stable officer. With a lot of

The Unit experience. He proved himself in the Jordan crossing incident as a courageous, determined officer with good instincts in ***real*** action. I loved him. I took him to Operation Halutz. Now again. His strength, stamina and solid character will be needed in the coming hours.

~~touched down on the main road running east toward the Egyptian air base at Bir~~

~~Gafgafa and the Suez Canal.~~ We had mounted the equipment on the cart, back at our base, before takeoff. As soon as we landed, we telescoped out its sides and double-checked it for stability. Within seconds the roaring engines sound was taken over by deep serene silence. Bright night. Flat desert Hamada. A surrealist picture. A lone person in fatigue and heavy gear walking, up

straight, westward, under half moon and star-filled skies. Some 50 yards behind him four guys the first two very tall the rear two very short, all leaning deeply forward dragging like work horses a four wheels low cart with huge heap of packages over it. It took us an hour to reach the road and perform all tracks disguising rituals. We finally ended up at a point we've visited six

months ago and immediately start to work. It lay under the shadow – if there had been one – of a place called Jabal Libni. In Arabic, “jabal” meant mountain. But this was more like a very big hill, maybe 450 feet high over the plateau.

The Goldac, the treasure finder gadget worked well and verified what our eyes told us about the cable location. About 15 yards from the paved road,

which went from El Arish on the Mediteranean Sinai shore, southward toward Gebel Libni crossroad, the main crossroad of eastern Sinai, where you could choose to go westward towards Bir Gafagfa and The Suez Canal, or southward towards Bir Hassaneh and Gabel Hillal, or alternatively eastwards toward El Qsseime and the Israeli Negev. Traffic was very rare, a car every several

minutes. Oded Rabinovitch and Nissim were sent to some 80 yards on either direction as out watches, and we Kobi , Madar and Myself started to dig. Two at most could dig together, due to the small size if the holeWe and set off in a series of wide, overlapping loops on either side of the road so that, if Egyptian trackers later paid any attention to the disturbance,

~~they'd be unable to establish where we'd touched down and where we were going. We did the first part of the journey on the road. With our Jeep tires, we had to spend less time than I'd at first feared in covering our traces. We deliberately cut into the desert 200 yards past the place where we hoped to find the cable junction. Then we doubled back, on the road, and got to work.~~

~~We'd been right about the location of the cable. It was just off the road, near where it met the main route south through the Sinai from El Arish on the Mediterranean coast. It lay under the shadow – if there had been one – of a place called Jabal Libni. In Arabic, "jabal" meant mountain. But this was more like a very big hill, maybe 450 feet high.~~

Once we got there, however, we ran into trouble. The top layer of sand was easy enough to remove. We did so, carefully, knowing we would have to replace and restore it. Yet as we started digging the three and half-foot-deep six feet long trench for the equipment, we found the cable at relatively shallow depth of some foot and few inches. That was a good surprise, just to be

followed by the bad ***reason*** for it. We ran into something hard just a few inches down. Whether it was a sheet of rock, or just sand that packed and toughened over the millennia, it resisted all efforts to break through it.

Against all predictions following the geological research and even the analysis of the ground samples we brought with us six months ago,

we seemed to choose a very bad point to dig. And there was no way to change it by now. We were already an hour into digging. Usually that sufficed to have a good hole and start connecting the T-exit. We were frighteningly far from it by now.~~t,~~ ~~we ran into something hard just a few inches down. Whether it was a sheet of rock, or just sand that packed and toughened over the millennia,~~

~~it resisted all efforts to break through it.~~ All of us tried, not just with the shovels we'd brought but with our much heavier {(?)Big Piolet-like tool that is used to break the ground and dig in hard soils, soft rocks)?}. I noticed that traffic went down, and anyhow we could know a car is approaching by its headlights aora, at least three minutes before it appears at

sight. The chances of people just walking on the road at night seemed to be low. The dogs barking from the Egyptian Air force base some half a mile to the south was stable and not alarming. I decided to call in Both Oded and Nissim to help intensify the digging. Kobi and myself will share the watching from our working point. It is much inferior and

contained more risks. But the alternative was much worse.

~~every remotely useful metal implement in our packs.~~ Sparks flew off the steel as we pounded at it. An emergaency was emerging. If we can’t dig deep enough, no way to put the T-exit and /or to set in the System. –Even with the much reinfoeced digging force i~~I~~t took almost three ~~well over an~~ hours before, already towards

our “last time’ when I decided to stop digging. ‘Last time’ in this case was more complicated term to deal with than the Syrian Height case we experienced in Operation Har a year earlier. Then, it was just about taking yourself, from wherever you were, turning backward and go home. Here, there was a need to make sure that even if worse comes to worst and you have to abort an

operation during execution, you will still have enough time to close everything you've open, the cable, the diggd hole, the 'cosmetics' appearance of the ground and some track disguising rituals, just to make sure the real debacle and its price, in terms of exposure and its consequences, won't come tomorrow morning.

I predicted that if I won't stop digging now, I will

inevitably caught later in the ‘last time’ trap. The whole was still too short for ordinary working conditions, but long enough for the Stainless steel cage. It was clearly not deep enough, for all the system to be buried deep enough under the ground surface. ~~we got at least close enough to the required depth to get to work.~~ We had not enough room. Probably we will have to painfully cut the

amount of batteries cases, at a price for the longevity of the System. But it was too early to decide.~~Barely.~~ Madar and Nissim entered the hole. We covered them with an opaqe blanket, they lit up their surgeon-like headlights and started working, silence again. Exept for the sporadic humming buzz from some equipment underneath the blanket. Madar and Nissim were well aware of

the short time frame. But like any surgical operation, the slightest mistake could turn being fatal.

Madar and Nissim managed to install the T-junction, and the heavy transmission pack. They secured the metal cage, attached the rubber seals, and painted on multiple coats of the weatherproofing epoxy. They anyhow finished it in almost a record time of 50 minutes. We

were now 10 minutes better than an hour ago. However, It would not suffice.~~We~~ T- exit now in place , the blanket removed and a fervent action to connect the system started. It was really tiny hole compared to some we digged in the Negev, but I decided to put in everything including all batteries. And pay the price by reducing the soil cover from some 16” to 12”. It also had to do with the

engineers’ ‘second thoughts’, which Avraham and myself ignored. The thinner the cover, the stronger the emerging signal. And I well knew that each inch counts.~~managed to install the T-junction, and the heavy transmission pack. We secured the metal cage. We attached the rubber seals, and painted on multiple coats of the weatherproofing epoxy.~~

By now, time was running short, leaving us much less leeway before sunrise than I'd figured to make sure we covered any trace of our being there and be in the evacuation planned point on 'last time'. There was another problem, too, which I at first sensed more than saw: a bank of fog appeared to be closing in. Sporadic at first and gradually more and more often. I had the

same Motorola we'd taken on to the ~~–~~Syrian Heights~~Golan~~. We had some 6-8, one word codes, for different stages of the operation, once they're completed. But beyond this, we'd agreed to break radio silence only if absolutely necessary and we had some dozen different one sentence codes to concisely describe those contingencies. ~~If we did need~~ we chose ~~to talk, we decided on~~

a frequency close to the one used by the UN force, and trained ourselves to speak in English, using the UN style of opening and closing exchanges, rather than Hebrew. Now, there was no choice but to call in. If the fog continued to thicken, it would block any chance of the helicopter coming in to get us. The last thing I wanted now was to have ‘MY’ contingency, of going back home

on feet,turning into being our only option. This was a contingency for which I insisted to train, against Amit’s and Avraham’s judgment. , Once daylight broke, there was every risk we’d run into trouble.~~an Egyptian patrol.~~ I contacted the command post on Mount Keren and, as calmly as I could ~~without preliminaries,~~ said: “ M~~The m~~ilk is coming.” It wasn’t

elegant. More like a Columbian or Fijy Islands officer, rather than UK or US one. Yet~~I'm sure~~ I believe, the accent was little better than my stab at Arabic in Gaza. But it got the message across: "milk" was our codeword for fog. Once approved, it was meaning automatically that the helicopter will try to evacuate us from the egreed

point of rendws-vous in 30 minutes.

With the murkiness closing in further, I knew we couldn’t risk going all the way back to our original landing point for the rendez-vous. We fastly closed and cleared the working point. Made the minimal track disguise maneuver, crossed the road and headed fast eastward. Now with very light weights we could almost run. The fog get

heavier. It was clear I had to choose a much closer evecuation point. Technically it was all the same. Total plateau. I radioed by code the direction and distance correction relative to the originally agreed point of evacuation. Fog turned so heavy and persistent that I decided to stop. I stood still. The other four left the cart besides me and created the trapez-like pattern made of

small kerosene flares we all had in our gears, which shows the pilot the place and direction for preferred landing. This practice assumed the pilot could see the trapez from afar and complete his landing while watching it continously. That was clearly not the case. We could hear the chopper wandering somewhere over the almost permanent fast moving cover of fog, but never

seen it. Then it turned closer and closer, louder and louder sound, while we still could see nothing. Than , suddenly we saw it , first the landing gears them the lower part of its body, descending quite fast from some 40 feet over our heads, not vertically as usual, but with strong drift towards me and the cart , as if it was not fully controlled. And than two seconds before either

crashing over me and the cart landing lights were on, a dramatic intervention of Sivron, as I learned later, against all rules and practices we expected. The chopper pilot Naveh, violently stopped the drift, raising its nose steeply upward. The heavy bird stalled –like and landed unevenly, and strongly shaking, on the ground. we were inside it within ten seconds. He took off

into the fog. Another ten tense seconds where I couldn’t feel any movement before I felt we are really flying, hopefully gaining altitude. In 30 seconds we were fully above a seemingly perfect fog blanket without a single hole in it. What a (double) close call. ~~Each of us took a kerosene flare from our backpacks. We arranged the flares in a big arrow shape, hoping they would guide the~~

~~pilot to his new landing spot. I'm not sure he would have made it from the flares alone. But just as we heard the first faint beat of helicopter blades, a small window opened in the fog. A minute later, the pilot was on the ground.~~ As we swooped back, very low, across into Israel, I could see the first deep pink of sunrise. By the time we touched down at Tel Nof air force base southeast of

Tel Aviv, the command post in the Negev, with Avraham and Amit, Chaimr Bar-Lev and Yitzhak Rabin himself all in attendance, was receiving the intercept transmissions from the Sinai. A young soldier in The Unit, whose role as a security guard for the improvised command post, brought him close to the hut were the big guys sat together during the operation, couldn’t

stand the temptation to look into it for long moments along this uniquw nights. He vividly described to me the intense, worried atmosphere once I radioed, ‘Milk is coming’ and on. Solemn faces, loe pitch discussions by Avraham Dovik and Amit. Rabin ,ostensibly deeply disturbed, chain smoking and biting finger nails. And the sigh of relief when Naveh radied: over the fog. Heading

home. The young soldiers' name was Avsha Horan. We will hear of him later.

* * *

With the rest of my team, I was invited to meet Rabin ten days~~wo weeks~~ later in the *kirya* in Tel Aviv. We were asked to describe certain moments of the operation have some roasted peanuts and raise a glass with

the Chief of Staff, being given a further *tzalash*, for our mission in the Sinai. This was the first time I'd met Rabin since I'd received my officer's insignia from him nearly two years earlier. Then, I had felt a bit overwhelmed in his presence. Now, I was struck by how shy *he* seemed. He greeted us with a tentative(?)/ surprisingly soft handshake, and seemed uncomfortable with

making eye contact with any of us. Once he started asking me about the operation, however, it was as if he’d been transformed. He was hungry for every detail, and obviously pleased by what we had achieved.

The Sinai success marked a transition not just for me, but for others. Avraham Arnan, having founded the unit and led it for all but one of its first

five years, now moved on. He became head of the technology unit. Dovik Tamari took over command of the sayeret, serving the first in what would become regular stints of two ~~to three~~ years for Avraham's successors.

And I, too, moved up. Dovik chose me as deputy commander.

Another sayeret team handled our next Sinai mission a year later, placing an intercept on the second of the Egyptians'

main military communications cables. I was co-opted to join them, however, in order to draw on my experience of the terrain and the real-time pressures of the operation.

> More than of the Tzalash, which as earlier, was just a two or three sentences letter, personally signed by the Chief of Staff, I was proud ~~of my two military decorations –~~ of my role in~~but less the~~

~~decorations, than~~ the sayeret achievements for which the Tzalash letters had~~y'd~~ been awarded. We knew enough , by now about our Intelligence strong and weak points to realize~~I realized there were limits to what we in the unit could know about the wider Israeli security picture. But I felt sure~~ that if we *did* have to fight again, especially if we had to fight the Egyptians,

the equipment we'd installed would give us an important edge. And events would prove that to be true.

But surprising though I know it sounds, even to me in retrospect, I didn't believe there would be another major war. Flare-ups, perhaps. Skirmishes. Attacks, and reprisals. But not another conflict on the scale of 1956, and certainly not the scale of

1948. —Late one night in our clubhouse, shortly after I became Dovik’s deputy, I remember turning to Uri Zakay. Neither of us could see into the future. But I said I strongly believe ~~was willing to bet him~~ that by the time I was married and had a Bar Mitzvah~~teenage~~ child, I’d be able to take him and ~~my~~ family on a skiing holiday ~~in one of the resorts~~ in Lebanon. We

didn’t have peace yet. That might take time. “But things are getting more *normal*,” I said. Extrapolating from 48’ to the 54-56 period of intensive terror epitomized in the Suez campaign, and comparing those violent eight years, to the following, so quiet, eight years (57-64), I concluded that we are gradually sliding naturally towards normal

relationships with our neighbors.

I began thinking a lot about what this would mean, not just for the unit, but for my future too. By the autumn of 1964, I had reached a decision. At first, Dovik tried to talk me out of it. He did persuade me to delay acting on it for nearly a year, which was needed anyhow to enable me taking the new course in life. But at the

end of the summer of 1965, I made it official. I left Sayeret Matkal. In fact, I left the army altogether – to study math and physics at Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

I knew that I would remain involved in Sayeret Matkal, as a reservist. But I could not see devoting my adult life to military service in a country and society that now seemed, and I was quite happy with it,

on a trajectory toward _ normalcy vis-a-vis the neighborhood.~~peace~~.

I‘ve just completed the most fascinating and empowering five years I could had dreamt of~~I, too~~, and was ripe~~nted~~ to pursue we the same eagerness and energy another, more normal, path.

And there was something else that colored my thinking as well. For the first[(?)EB. I

> was in love with Nili since the eve of my trip to Mont Louis, may,63’] time in my life, I was in love.